



Chapter 8

Public Participation and Agency Coordination

8.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND AGENCY COORDINATION

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process has been followed throughout the preparation of this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). For the Antelope Valley (AV) DEIS, public participation and agency coordination have figured prominently throughout the AV Major Investment Study (MIS) *and* the NEPA process. Input into the AV MIS and DEIS from outside sources is discussed below.¹

The extensive community involvement process and the functioning of the Advisory Committee in particular demonstrates that reasonable effort has been expended to seek out the broadest possible input and to recognize the specific interests and needs of diverse communities. The changes in the transportation and stormwater management alignments that have been made to reflect input also demonstrate honest efforts to develop consensus on an acceptable preferred alternative. Further, the advancement of community revitalization concepts is directly related to the needs of various populations, including minority and low-income households in the study area. The public involvement process described throughout this Section was inclusive of all residents and population groups in the study area and did not exclude any persons because of income, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or handicap; or any other reason.

8.1 Public Participation

Public participation in the AV Study includes an Advisory Committee, the involvement of neighborhoods and business groups in neighborhood and special topic meetings, widely attended town hall meetings, and input from public officials.

The AV MIS has included over one thousand meetings, and has been advised by an Advisory Committee comprised of neighborhood and business representatives and agency staff. Through these efforts, the AV MIS has made substantive effort to meet with all segments of the community. The approach has been very inclusive throughout the process -- from needs identification, alternative development and screening, to analysis of impacts. The extensive meetings have included residents, leadership from neighborhood groups and business representatives. Many of these individuals are on the Advisory Committee, which has been meeting monthly since the onset of the AV MIS in 1996.

Special attention to the needs of minority groups has been paid, and the AV MIS has enlisted the active participation of the residents in the South study section where minority group representation is greatest. Over 15 organizations and 16 known leaders of the minority community have been involved throughout the study and participated in over 60 meetings. In addition, neighborhood representatives have been actively involved in committees and work groups such as the Work Plan Review Committee

¹ Technical reports, which are identified in this EIS, are all incorporated by reference in this EIS. Appendix A provides a complete list of referenced reports. Copies of this EIS and the Antelope Valley Study Team reports are available for public viewing from the City of Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Department, Suite 213, 555 South 10th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska, 68508. Copies of this EIS and Study Team reports are also available for viewing at city public libraries and available for purchase at Kinko's Copies, 1201 Q Street, Lincoln, Nebraska, 68508.

(also known as the Process Committee), Advisory Committee, Community Revitalization Team, and the Town Hall Planning Committee.

8.1.1 Work Plan Review Committee

The actual public involvement process used for the AV MIS was established by citizens who participated in a Work Plan Review Committee. During spring 1996, the committee reviewed the AV MIS work plan and discussed the general approach to the AV MIS. The committee established “fair play rules” that were published and used by all committees participating in the AV MIS. The sections that follow describe the public involvement elements of the AV MIS and the on-going study.

8.1.2 Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee has been an important element of the AV MIS and advises the study Partners. The Advisory Committee, with over 80 members, consists of technical advisory staff as well as community and business representatives. The committee includes interested and involved federal, state, and local agencies and elected officials, neighborhood groups, and interested individuals. The Advisory Committee initially worked together to identify and define the Purposes and Needs the MIS should address and hosted the first Town Hall Meeting. Following this, they helped develop, screen and refine alternatives. They also reviewed staff materials as documents and findings became available, and guided the evolution and development of the Draft Single Package. Through on-going monthly meetings, they have been instrumental in refining the Amended Draft Single Package.

8.1.3 Issues Work Groups

Five issues Work Groups were formed early in the AV MIS to discuss concerns and issues that were brought up in the broadly defined area of community revitalization. The groups held multiple “workshops” and covered the following five topics: trails and open space, youth recreation, housing, health and human services, and business development. Their input helped define the options to be evaluated for inclusion in the Draft Single Package.

8.1.4 Neighborhoods and Business Groups

The interests of neighborhoods and business groups were considered during the creation of the Amended Draft Single Package. This was accomplished through over 160 staff presentations and discussions with citizens at neighborhood meetings, meetings of fraternal organizations, downtown business groups, and special topic meetings. Examples include the downtown design charrette and several meetings with 33rd Street area business owners. There were also extensive meetings with downtown business owners and the Downtown Lincoln Association.

The input from these groups helped to shape the ultimate Amended Draft Single Package concept, and resulted in some refinements to roadway locations of the Amended Draft Single Package. For example, neighborhood concerns resulted in the Amended Draft Single Package including community revitalization very prominently, moving traffic off neighborhood streets, and placing new roads at the edges of communities (not within). In addition, the interests of those groups present within the

study area were considered throughout the assessment of impacts and consideration of necessary mitigation.

8.1.5 Town Hall Meetings

Two town hall meetings were held to present the findings of the AV MIS and to record and address public comments on the AV MIS. The two-day meetings were well attended by the citizens of Lincoln, and provided valuable input to the formulation of the Amended Draft Single Package as shown and studied in this DEIS.

Town Hall 1. Town Hall 1 was held in September 1996 to present the Purpose and Need statement to the public, discuss the study area's strengths and opportunities, and reach public consensus. The meeting included a slide show introducing AV MIS issues to the attendees, a keynote speaker to discuss community revitalization, small discussion groups focusing on Purpose and Need and opportunities and constraints, exhibits, and a bus and walking tour of the study area. Feedback from Town Hall 1 was used to create four alternative packages and, ultimately, the initial Draft Single Package concept.

Town Hall 2. Town Hall 2 was held November 1997 to review the Draft Single Package concept, tour the study area, and receive feedback on the Draft Single Package for future phases of study. As with Town Hall 1, this meeting included small discussion groups and a bus tour. In addition, Town Hall 2 was advertised in the Federal Register through a Notice of Intent to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement. As such, it served as the formal Scoping meeting for the DEIS. Comments received during Scoping are contained in the separate *Scoping Summary* and are addressed in the text of this DEIS.

8.1.6 Elected Officials

A number of elected officials are active members of the Advisory Committee. Elected officials were also invited to the town hall meetings as well as to a number of neighborhood and design charrette meetings. In addition, approximately 35 special briefings to individual elected officials were provided at key study milestones.

Super Commons meetings of the Mayor and City and County elected officials were held at key study milestones. Super Commons meetings were conducted for the AV MIS in November 1996, December 1997, and August 1998. In addition to City and County elected officials, the meetings included senior representatives from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) and Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD). In November 1996, the Super Commons reviewed the results of Phases I and II of the MIS and unanimously supported continued study. In December 1997, the Super Commons reviewed the findings of Phase III, and specifically considered the Draft Single Package described in this document. They recommended that the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Department consider recommending to City Council a formal *Comprehensive Plan* amendment that would adopt the Draft Single Package as part of the plan. At the August 1998 Super Commons meeting, the group agreed to continue to support AV MIS efforts, similar to each of the previous Super Commons meetings.

8.1.7 Newsletters

Several newsletters were published throughout the course of the AV MIS and distributed to a broad mailing list. The newsletter mailing list of over 2,500 people includes residents, property owners, agency staff, and community leaders. Copies of newsletters are appended to the *Phase I/II Summary Report*, the *Phase III Summary Report*, and the *Scoping Summary*.

8.1.8 Media Interaction

Media interaction included press releases at key study milestones to announce public open houses and town hall meetings. These were intended to encourage public service announcements and news articles that inform the public of upcoming events. Videos were prepared that were broadcast on local access cable networks to further disseminate information regarding the AV MIS. Over 20 briefings with the media were held throughout the AV MIS.

On several occasions, AV MIS team staff conducted radio interviews and/or hosted call in shows to discuss the AV MIS and potential improvements in the Antelope Valley study area.

8.1.9 Community Revitalization Team

Meetings of a special community revitalization team were conducted to address the broad area of community revitalization and to be responsive to neighborhood concerns. This group actively participated in concept development of parks and recreation plans, downtown development plans, and wrap-around concepts. The group interacted with neighborhood groups and provided public forums for topics to be discussed. The community revitalization team conducted almost 200 meetings to specifically discuss community revitalization elements with stakeholders in this area. In addition over 120 neighborhood meetings were conducted throughout the AV MIS. The community revitalization team also organized public workshops and charrettes.

8.2 Public Hearings

During the course of the AV MIS, several public hearings related to the AV MIS have been conducted. These include hearings in front of the City of Lincoln Common Council, the Lancaster County Board, and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Commission. Most recently, public hearings were conducted by the Lincoln-Lancaster County Planning Commission on October 7, 1998 and the City of Lincoln on November 2, 1998. Both bodies approved amendment of the Comprehensive Plan to include the Amended Draft Single Package. The Planning Commission approval was by a vote of 6-1 and the City of Lincoln vote (November 16) was unanimous (7-0). The result of this round of public hearings was to formally amend the *Comprehensive Plan* to include the Amended Draft Single Package as it is configured in this DEIS.

A public hearing will be conducted during the circulation period of this DEIS. Study findings will be presented and public comments will be received. A written transcript and a summary of comments and responses will be prepared as part of a Final EIS (FEIS).

8.3 Agency Coordination

Consistent agency representation on the Advisory Committee, attendance at town hall meetings, and thorough Scoping commentary, characterized agency participation throughout the AV MIS. Agency involvement during the development of this DEIS has continued to be extensive through the formal NEPA/404 MERGE process in Nebraska. The joint process is designed to coordinate all aspects of NEPA and the US Army Corps of Engineers' 404(b)(1) permitting process for dredging and filling Waters of the United States, which include wetlands. Signatories to the MERGE agreement include the following:

- US Federal Highway Administration (FHWA),
- US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS),
- US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA),
- Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR),
- Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC), and
- Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality (NDEQ).

As signatories to the MERGE agreement, these agencies have agreed to review and sign off on the NEPA/404(b)(1) requirements at the following four concurrence points:

- Purpose and Need,
- Alternatives Carried Forward,
- Selected Alternative, and
- Minimization of Impacts.

At this point, agency concurrences on the AV MIS Purpose and Need and on alternatives carried forward have been completed. (See attached letters in Appendix H).

Letters of concurrence are contained in the *Wetland Delineation Report*, and were received from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). Agencies not responding are assumed to be in agreement with the AV MIS Purpose and Need.

Agency concurrence regarding alternatives carried forward will be simultaneous to the pre-DEIS circulation among MERGE agencies. Upon reaching concurrence, a notice of the DEIS availability and announcement of a public hearing will be published in the Federal Register.